Farm to School Project for North Adams Public Schools

Carmen Saab, Ang Sherpa, Marcos Soto
Professor Gardner
Environmental Planning
December 2018
# Table of Contents:

I. Introduction & Methodology ........................................................................... 3
II. Physical Site Description ............................................................................. 5
III. Community Profile ...................................................................................... 8
IV. Berkshire County Agricultural Economy ...................................................... 11
V. Research on Farm to School ......................................................................... 14
VI. Farm to School: Law & Policy ..................................................................... 17
VII. Economic and Technical Considerations .................................................... 19
VIII. Farm to School Case Studies ..................................................................... 21
   i. Burlington, VT
   ii. Richmond, MA
IX. Questionnaire and Interviews ................................................................... 24
   i. Questionnaire for Farmers
X. Interview Analysis ....................................................................................... 27
   i. Immediately Interested
   ii. Interested
   iii. Not Interested
XI. Brayton Survey Results .............................................................................. 37
XII. Toolkit .......................................................................................................... 39
XIII. XII. Official Recommendations ................................................................. 42
      i. Harvest of the Month: North Adams Edition
      ii. Burnett Farms: Community Farm, Land-Leasing, or Farming Projects
XIV. Implementation Strategies & Recommendations ......................................... 47
XV. Conclusion .................................................................................................. 50
XVI. Acknowledgements .................................................................................... 51
XVII. Works Cited .............................................................................................. 52
I. Introduction & Methodology

This past semester our team worked with clients Amanda Chilson, from the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, and Cory Nicholas, the North Adams public schools food service director, to implement a Farm to School program. We worked directly with Cory, the food service director, to find suitable, local farmers who could supply the school system with fruits and vegetables. Our research and methodology were twofold: gauge interest and feasibility from local farmers, as well as from the North Adams public school students. In addition to Cory's guidance, we also reached out to other food service directors in the area, who have worked with these same local farmers. We interviewed Bob Volpi, the Williams College Dining Services Director, Pat Carridi, the Culinary Arts Director at McCann Technical School, and Tammy Jervas who heads the food service program at Richmond Consolidated Schools in Richmond, MA. In addition to nearby food service directors, we also interviewed Lisa Damon, the Massachusetts Farm to School Representative and Nick Martinelli from Marty's Local, a local food distributor. These interviews, in addition to those done with the farmers, gave us insight into successful implementation and challenges of Farm to School, particularly in the Berkshires.

The bulk of our research was in-person and over the phone with local farmers, determining if they could be a source of produce for the North Adams public schools. Another central aspect of our project was a site visit to Brayton Elementary School, one of the four North Adams schools that we worked with. At Brayton, our goals were to survey the students, as well as speak with the kitchen staff to further understand their vision of Farm to School and its feasibility. Another, less hands-on aspect of our project, was researching national and state-level Farm to School programs, gathering data about the
Berkshire’s agricultural economy as well as legal concerns with Farm to School and potential grants. At the end of our project, we presented to the Berkshire Food Access Collaborative on December 11th, and put together an official “Farm to School in North Adams Toolkit.” This toolkit, or guidance document, not only includes all of our research and the results of our interviews, but also enumerates our recommendations for implementation. This guidance document is available as a PDF, and was given to our clients, Amanda and Cory, with the hopes of further distribution. As mentioned, longevity and future success were key goals for our project, so we wanted to make the Toolkit as understandable and direct as we could. We believe that this project will outlast our involvement, so the Toolkit should help guide the next steps forward.

We reached out to 35 farmers nearby, 23 of whom were willing to be interviewed. There were eleven that never responded, yet some of those farms are not currently functioning. For the interviews, we crafted a questionnaire that reflected the information that we found most relevant to the project. In addition to asking the basic logistical questions, we also asked about some of the concerns we had and challenges that we foresaw with other Farm to School programs. Of the farmers that we spoke to, we were enthused by their interest. However, despite receiving more interest than we originally expected, there was some general hesitation to committing to a project of this scale. At this point in our project, we are assuming that the nine farms we have not heard back from after much pestering are uninterested in working with us. In addition to hearing from farmers, we also created a survey for the students at Brayton Elementary. Because we were speaking with first, second, fifth and sixth graders, we felt we needed to have a visual
survey sheet where students would be able to circle the fruits and vegetables they like and dislike easily.

II. Physical Site Description

Our project does not have an established site. Instead, we are looking at the connections we can help establish between the North Adams school system and the local farms. Thus, our site description would include the schools and potential farms that would take part in the farm to school program. There are four schools in the North Adams Public School System: Brayton Elementary School, Colegrove Park Elementary School, Drury High School, and Greylock Elementary School. We will be speaking about them in further detail in the following section on community profile.

We connected with the following list of farmers:

Red Shirt Farm, Lanesboro (interested)

Jaeschke's Orchards, Adams (immediately interested)

Brian Cole, Williamstown (immediately interested)

Ioka Valley Farm, Hancock (interested)

Brattle Farm, Pittsfield (interested)

Black Bear Farm, Savoy (not interested)

Holiday Brook Farm, Dalton (somewhat interested)

Mountain Girl Farm, North Adams (not interested)

Blair Farm, Williamstown (retired)

Heavy Metal Farm (out of commission)
Colfax Farm (interested)

Wildstone, Pownal VT (interested)

Grateful Greens, Stephentown, NY (immediately interested)

Many Forks Farm, Clarksburg (interested)

Burnett Farm, Adams (interested)

Square Roots Farm, Lanesborough (interested)

Mighty Food Farm, Pownal, VT (interested)

Caretaker Farm (not interested)

MX Morningstar Farm (interested)

Talus Wood Farm (interested)

Windsor Jambs Farm (potentially interested)

Marty's Local (interested)

Markristo Farm (somewhat interested)

We have contacted the following list of farmers:

Burnett Farm, Adams

Jennings Brook Farm, New Ashford

Flynn Farm, Pittsfield

Hancock Shaker Village, Pittsfield

Bittersweet Farm, Pittsfield

Fort Hill Farm, Pittsfield

Bartlett’s Orchard, Richmond

Berry Patch, Stephentown NY
Wyomanock Farm, Stephentown NY
Kinderhook Creek Farm, Stephentown, NY
New Leaf Farm, New Lebanon, NY
Abode Farm, New Lebanon, NY
Peace Valley Farm, Williamstown

Figure 1: Map of Farms Interviewed with dark green indicating immediate interest, light green interest, and yellow not interested. The purple indicates the four schools and blue highlights farms with alternative ways of contributing to the mission of farm to school.

Initially, the list of farms had covered Pownal, Vermont and six areas of the Northern Berkshires: North Adams, Clarksburg, Lanesborough, New Ashford, Williamstown and Adams. However, we realized in order to speak to more farmers, we needed to expand our idea of local to include more farms. We expanded our reach to farms within an approximate hour of North Adams, considering delivery could be a concern. The longer the drive, the higher cost of the relationship with the school. In addition to the cost of gas, we realized that the farther away the farm is, the more North Adams public schools
will need to buy to make their trip worth the drive. For this reason, we wanted to clarify in conversations with farms that had longer drives how frequently they might be interested in delivering to the school. While expanding our outreach, we kept in mind the benefits of buying directly from a local source. The added investment that sourcing local could bring to farms in the area has the potential to boost the agricultural economy nearby. In addition to an economic boost, buying local can create healthy, lasting relationships between the North Adams schools and the nearby farms. We speak more on the benefits of farm to school in the section titled “Farm to School.” That being said, the relationships that we foresee with farmers who would work together with the school would also be educational. We emphasized and questioned whether there was interest in coming into the schools and speaking with students from the farmers end. Longer term, we would hope potential opportunities for the students to see the farms, such as field trips and workshops, could be a possibility. Of the farmers interviewed that had interest in the program, all of them were willing to introduce their farm and product at the different schools at least once a year if a relationship were to be established.

**III. Community Profile**

An essential piece to understanding the potential impact of Farm to School in North Adams is considering the community that would benefit. After the departure of Sprague Electric Company in the 1980s, North Adams’ economy has declined significantly as indicated by the growing unemployment rate and decreasing population. Even today, more than 30 years later, the effect of deindustrialization is evident in the economic challenges the North Adams residents currently face. According to the US Census data, the median
annual household income for North Adams in 2016 was $32,804, around $23,000 less than the annual income for the United States. Of the population for whom the poverty status has been determined in North Adams, about 18.9% live below the poverty line. There are many challenges of shifting so suddenly from a mainly industrial economy to a more diverse and service-based economy. With the flight of a major employer also came the significant decline in population. A community of around 18,063 in the 1980s when Sprague was still in production, now is 13,326 residents. This 26% decrease in population has significant effects on the community and schools and businesses in the area. With fewer students in schools, many schools in North Adams have been consolidating to save on costs and space.

All of the North Adams Public Schools participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program. This is a federal program that allows high poverty schools and districts to serve free meals to all enrolled students without collecting individual household information. According to the most recent North Adams Public Schools annual report, there are currently a combined total of 1,462 students in the four schools. The school lunch
participation rate was over 80% and the school breakfast participation rate was over 60%.
Additionally, Brayton Elementary School,Colegrove Park Elementary School, and Greylock
Elementary School participate in the USDA Afterschool Snack Program. Dinner service
during the weekday is also available for students at Brayton Elementary School. With a
variety of meals being served in the dining halls, there are many opportunities to
implement more local farm products.

As mentioned earlier, the four public schools that make up the North Adams Public
School System are Brayton Elementary School, Colegrove Park Elementary School, Drury
High School, and Greylock Elementary School. The following information comes from the
individual school’s most recently made available improvement plan. Brayton Elementary
School is split between two locations. About one-third of the students are enrolled in the
pre-kindergarten morning and afternoon sessions at the former Johnson School. The other
two third of the students in grades kindergarten through seventh are at the Brayton site.
More than seventy percent of the student body at Brayton qualify for free and reduced
meals. During the 2015-2016 school year, 29.1 % of Colegrove Park Elementary School’s
student body represented students with disabilities, 55.2% were economically
disadvantaged, and 68.4% were categorized as high needs. During the 2017-2018 school
year, Drury High School transitioned from an 8-12 grade school to a 7-12 grade school.
Greylock Elementary School serves students from kindergarten to seventh grade.

North Adams is one of the four USDA recognized food deserts in the Berkshire
region. There are many barriers preventing the residents from taking advantage of the
local farms and seasonal produce in the Berkshires. Many residents, especially children and
the elderly, cannot access healthy food as easily because they are unable to drive to the
nearest grocery store. Establishing a farm to school program in North Adams would target school children and make local produce more accessible for them. Because the students receive such a wide range of meals in the schools, bringing fresh, local produce to the schools and educating students in the ways food affects their health and wellbeing would greatly benefit them.

IV. Berkshire County Agricultural Economy

Farming has been a part of the identity of Berkshire County since the 1800s. It is the home of the nation’s first agricultural fair and even hosted the first plowing contest. It has been an area for innovation that has helped set the tone for agriculture across the country. Tourism and agro-tourism benefit the farms and contribute to the local economy. For example, there are tour buses that bring people into the Berkshires during the fall to experience the fall foliage and enjoy all of the rich colors the scenery offers. A big attraction when coming to view the foliage is to stop at an apple orchard to enjoy some cider and donuts. People also visit farms at other times of the year to meet farmers in person and buy their products directly. Most of the farms in the area have a storefront, and offer various products. Farms are a part of the identity of the region and have been around for centuries in the area.

The current agricultural economy today is not as strong as it used to be, but there many of the functioning farms remain. The region lost some farms in the late 1970s with the strong industrial farm movement that was based on a “get big or get out” mentality. Lots of farms in the area were gobbled up by larger corporations or forced to shut down because they could not compete. Phil Leahey, the owner of Leahey Farm in Berkshire
County, claimed in an interview that at one point there were about 150 dairy farms in the area. Now that number has dropped to about 13 dairy farms and only 150 dairy farms statewide. The farm economy of the area is not was it used to be, but its presence is still felt in the community. Massachusetts has some of the highest rates of farmers who sell directly to the local community through various venues such as farmers markets, farm stands, and community agricultural programs.

Farms in the Berkshires account for about 12% of all of the farmland in Massachusetts. Most of the farms are family owned and have been for quite some time. The owners tend to be older, having the farms in the family for an average of 92 years, according to a survey conducted in 2014. The region is able to generate about 12% of the food consumed in the area. According to the Keep Berkshires Farming study, the Berkshire region has enough land to support all of the residents of the community, but not all of the potential land is being used for farming. The study found that there is about 43,813 acres of prime agricultural soils total in the region. However only 12,421 of it is currently being farmed, leaving around 31,393 acres or about 72% of the the total agricultural soils not used. Prime agricultural soils are soils deemed by the USDA to be best for farming and have to be used for agriculture, so there is lots of land not being using in the region. This can be due to a variety of reasons such as the farmland being on private property, or owners not wanting to do anything with it. Also, the land may be expensive to acquire for farmers wanting to come into the region. Speaking to this, there is a notable gap between the region demand and region supply of all food categories except dairy. Dairy farms make up a small amount of the total farms in the area but account a good portion of total farm sales for the community. The demand is there, the land is there, but Berkshire County does not have the
number of farmers able to reach the region’s demand for food. It is difficult for farmers to acquire and be able to use it. Lastly, there is a desire for some type of meat processing plant or transfer facility in the region for the farmers that grow livestock. Having a meat processing plant may make it easier for farmers to prepare and sell their products locally. Also, producing meat can be more lucrative for farmers. The Keep Berkshire Farming study estimated that in 2012 farmers spend about $3.25 million on services and goods related to farming operations. However, only about $540,000 was spent locally in the Berkshire region.

It is also important to note how the effects of climate change can alter productivity levels of food production. According to the National Climate Assessment for 2018, climate change can cause alterations in rainfall patterns, altered pattern of pest pressure, and more frequent occurrences of climate extremes, all which will affect agricultural productivity. Building up the regional food system in the Berkshires may be a way to combat climate change. By establishing relationships and connections between farmers and the schools, this can help strengthen the regional food system as a way to protect against food insecurity. It may be increasingly more difficult to rely on larger, corporate farms to provide food because those are the farms that may be most affected. Sourcing local products and growing the local agricultural economy will have benefits in the face of climate change affecting agricultural productivity.

V. Research on Farm to School

In doing some implementation research on Farm to School, we felt it was important to do background research on Massachusetts’s role in farm to school. Massachusetts
considers their Farm to School Program an essential addition to their public school system. The Massachusetts's Farm to School's mission is that they “envision that all Massachusetts schools consistently teach about and serve local foods, supporting vibrant local farming and fishing communities and healthy schools, students and families.” Some of the benefits that the state-level program boasts are supporting the early development of healthy eating habits, boosting the quality of meals at school, alleviating some of the at-home food insecurity and increasing student and their family's healthy food consumption. Farm To School is also an experiential learning experience for young students learning and trying new foods. Additionally, Farm to School benefits the farmers. Farm to School can provide financial opportunity for local producers and strengthen community economic growth.

Currently, 68% of Massachusetts school districts say that they participate in Farm to School, a statistic higher than the national average of 42%. A quarter of Massachusetts farmers have been able to increase production to satisfy school demands. On the USDA’s National Farm to School census taken for Northern Berkshire, there is an example of the schools using a Farm to School-type system to get pears and apples from Jaeschke’s Orchard in Adams. However, for the most part, this district is yet to be involved with the national program. One program that Amanda mentioned would be a great place to start is the Massachusetts Harvest of the Month.

Harvest of the Month sets up a monthly connection to seasonal local foods. In particular, it is great for schools that are just beginning to incorporate local foods into their breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus. Harvest of the Month makes smaller scale-implementation more palatable by encouraging just one type of food per month. Massachusetts Farm to School helps this program be successful by providing promotional
materials and access to recipes and lesson plans. While Cory has not yet done Harvest of the Month, he has been in touch with Lisa Damon, the Massachusetts Farm to School representative for Western Massachusetts. She gave him most of the materials that he would need. While we believe that Harvest of the Month has potential to work in North Adams, some of produce that they promote are not feasible in the North Adams public school system. For example, Cory told us to limit our search to fruits and vegetables. However, Harvest of the Month encourages cheese, other dairy, meat and seafood. At this time, that scale of procurement is not a reality. However, as we will explain in our “Recommendations,” we believe a Harvest of the Month type of program that is specific to North Adams would be the most usable and beneficial.

We spoke with Lisa Damon, the Massachusetts Farm to School representative, to get a clearer understanding of how she suggests we implement Farm to School in North Adams. She heard our concerns and gave us some helpful advice that she had seen work in other school districts. First of all, she said that the most successful programs are linked directly to larger, more diverse farms. It makes it easier if the food service director is able to order a large yield and only has to deal with one farm at a time. Additionally, delivery becomes less of a concern when working with larger farms, because they are guaranteed to offset transportation expenses with the amount that they are producing. However, ordering a large quantity from a large farm is not quite a reality at this time for North Adams. Most of the farms in the area are small, yet produce a variety of fruits and vegetables. Looking at it from a North Adams perspective, we will definitely need a piecemeal approach that incorporates multiple farms per month.
Lisa Damon also told us that while Farm to School can be pricey, particularly as you start buying more produce, there are ways to offset costs without grants. While grants are a long-term goal for North Adams, we understand Cory’s concern with applying for grants at the moment. They can be cumbersome and frustrating to keep up with. However, Lisa mentioned offsetting the costs by looking at the weekly menu holistically. If one typically spends a certain amount per day per meal, it might be more beneficial to spend more on a day where one is using local produce and less on another day. Additionally, like we thought, the best way to begin is from the ground up. You have to start small with guaranteed successes, such as apples, pears and squash in order to get this type of program moving.

VI. Farm to School: Law & Policy

At a federal level, there are different laws that can affect the effort to start a farm to school at North Adams. First and foremost is the laws governing the procurement process of the school district. All of the schools must follow federal and state guidelines on procurement standard when purchasing food or services for the school nutrition program. The federal standards require the use of competitive sealed bids or competitive proposals for purchases over $150,000. The small purchase method applies for the purchases under the threshold of $150,000. The 2008 Farm Bill allowed schools to add the component of geographic preference to their procurement process. This means that schools can award preference points to food sourced from local food suppliers, making the local food supplier more competitive even with higher prices. In Massachusetts, House Bill 4429, passed in 2006, allowed schools in the state to buy Massachusetts products that were up to 110% of the lowest bid. It also allowed schools to forego the bidding process for contracts under
$25,000. Because this bill only applies to farms in Massachusetts, those farmers are at an advantage when compared with farms in New York and Vermont, we have to make note of the slight disadvantage. These are the laws that specifically affect the procurement process of North Adams Public School system.

As for laws regarding Farm to School projects, the national push to bring more farm foods to schools have resulted in push for more federal and state level laws that support farm to school initiatives. At the federal level, the most significant law in place is the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010. This act, a major victory for farm to school proponents, increased the annual funding for farm to school competitive grant and technical assistance program. As a result, more 12,300 schools have been able buy more local and nutritious foods for over 6.9 million students. However, the grant program still fails to assist all of the schools interested in starting a farm to school program. Since 2013, USDA has received more than 1,600 applications, but due to a lack of funding, it has only given out 365 awards totaling $25 million. Therefore, in September of 2017, members of Congress introduced Farm to School Act of 2017. This act proposes an increase of the annual mandatory funding from $5 million to $15 million and increases the scope of the grant program to include early care and education sites, summer food service program sites, and after school programs.

At a state level, Machasuttes has been encouraging schools to purchase more from farms within the state and also support the efforts of the Farm to School movement. House Bill 4919 promotes purchasing of local agricultural products and requires the Departments of Agriculture and Education to collect and publish data from schools and food producers. The departments also helps public schools purchase local food by working with different
programs. Passed in 2015, the House Bill 2782 requires the governor to declare October as Farm to School Month to highlight and celebrate local food and agriculture. This bill also encourages the state Departments of Education, Agriculture, and Health to collaborate with the state Farm to School Project to expand farm to school programs in general.

VII. Economic and Technical Considerations

In determining the feasibility of bringing the Farm to School program into the North Adams public school district, pricing of the food is of prime importance. Cory Nicholas, the Food Service Director for the district, places orders and buys all the produce for the four different schools weekly. He is required by law to buy a certain food product at the lowest price point at the time of the purchase. An economic challenge we have encountered while talking with Cory and local farmers is the fluctuation of prices from week to week. There are many different factors that can affect the price of a certain food item, but Cory has determined which is the lowest at the time of ordering. As the Food Service Director, Cory has to follow the law to purchase at the lowest price but that can change from fairly constantly. In terms of our project, this may pose a challenge for some local farms that need a longer preparation period before being able to deliver the produce--there has to be an agreement on the price long in advance. However, there are exceptions to this rule in terms of procurement that will make it easier for Cory to get around the pricing issue. If you are buying local from a Massachusetts farm, you are allowed to spend over the lowest price point. This rule attempts to encourage buying local, as opposed to just buying from the large food distributors.
A technical challenge that we have encountered through our project is how to compare the pricing between the local farmers and some of the bigger, corporate suppliers. Different farmers use different metrics for their produce, so there is an inconsistency running amongst the quantity and therefore pricing of produce. For example, the ordering procedure at Jaeschke’s Orchards is done by boxes of apples. This unit of measurement changes for each type of apple due to the various sizes and that affects how many apples Corey can put into the cafeterias for the students. The purchasing system of big distributors, according to Ginsberg, uses a different metric for produce and price. The variations of pricing and quantity can make the comparison between local farms and corporate distributors a little more challenging.

Another technical challenge we have discovered while talking with farmers is how the delivery process should work. Most of the farms have the ability to deliver, but they have expressed interest in just delivering to one spot, not necessarily driving around to the four different locations. If this is the case, Corey would be the one to delivery the produce to the different locations from the drop off point. There is the possibility of having the farmers deliver to the different schools but that is asking for extra work on their end and could affect their decision to participate in the farm to school program. We are working with Corey and farmers to determine the best system to deliver the produce to each of the four schools. That being said, Cory has expressed that aside from laws, they have the funds to support Farm to School. Especially at small-scale implementation, Cory feels that the price of the produce is manageable and not his biggest concern. As long as he is legally allowed to purchase the food (which he is), the price of fruits and vegetables shouldn’t be an issue.
Another technical consideration that is mostly out of our hands is the fact that most farms growing seasons don’t align with the school’s timeline. Many of the fruits and vegetables produced have main seasons in the summer and ending in the fall, which is right when the schools would need them. That being said, there are some vegetables that can be harvested in the late fall, early winter. These include beets, carrots, different types of squash, kale, arugula and other mixed greens. However, one concern with these vegetables is that many are outside of what Cory Nicholas typically orders from Ginsberg. He usually orders Romaine and Iceberg, so the greens could potentially supplement or replace those. However, squash is not typically on his list of produce. Squash would be a great vegetable to introduce to students because it is, to a certain extent, not well known.

These are some of the challenges that we encountered mostly from the school’s side of the project. When we spoke with the farmers, we tried to communicate these issues, in order to be transparent about what the program would look like.

**VIII. Farm to School Case Studies**

*Burlington, VT*

When analyzing the feasibility of a Farm to School Program in the North Adams public school system, we found that some of the most helpful research came from nearby, successfully implemented Farm to School programs. The State of Vermont, specifically the Burlington school district, has a Farm to School initiative that has been remarkably successful and a pioneer in the field for various reasons. Vermont boasts 83% of school district involvement with 12,347 students impacted by the nutritional education and food service programs (Farm to School Census). Additionally, they have seen a $1.4 million
dollar economic boost and support to the agricultural economy of Vermont. Yet, the success in Burlington is more nuanced, with 4,000 of the 12,346 (1/3) students getting local food and nutritional education.

First, the school district began the funding for their project with a 3-year USDA Community Food Projects grant for “Growing Farms, Growing Minds: The Burlington School Food Project.” This grant funded the hire of a specific Farm to School food service director, Sarah Heusner, for the district. With this position, the Farm to School director was paid to set up a cooperative between local farmers, as well as work with non-profit food hubs in the area to source local foods. The local food that Burlington sources ranges from fruits and vegetables to dairy, poultry and beef from 14 local farms. The main way that Burlington is able to sustain this type of procurement is through state and national grants that fund these large-scale purchases. The food service director has also solved some of the logistical hurdles through the non-profit food hubs that serve as the middle-man between the school and the farms.

As we have realized in analyzing the feasibility in North Adams, funding is one of the biggest hurdles of this project. While there are many boasted social benefits that are relevant both in North Adams and Burlington, the upfront cost of buying local produce from farmers is simply unsustainable or limited without a grant or a source of reliable funding. The logistics of delivery and procurement in Burlington are also much more streamlined than in North Adams, where there are no food hubs or non-profit delivery agencies. Ultimately, while Burlington is the USDA Farm to School’s top-rated school district and provides a great model, it will take time to replicate in North Adams.
Richmond, MA

We found that the Richmond, Massachusetts case study was an important piece to our project. Richmond, MA is also in the Berkshire region and has been doing "farm to school" for years now. One of the reasons that it has been considerably easier to implement in Richmond is that they only have 1,475 residents in the town, a number that is almost identical to the number of students this program would serve in North Adams. There is also only one school in Richmond, Richmond Consolidated, that is K-8th grade. This makes it easier for local farms to only have one drop-off site with significantly less people to provide for.

We spoke on the phone with the food service director of Richmond Consolidated, Tammy Jervas. Ms. Jervas says that she has been getting local food into the cafeteria for years now. One of the best ways to begin implementing it was to just go out and talk directly with local farmers. She said that in the years she has continued with the project, she has noticed unbelievable generosity on the part of farmers. She attributes this to the fact that she goes directly to them once or twice a week to pick up. Tammy has in-person conversations and has developed reliable, healthy relationships with many farmers in the area. She said one of the farms that doesn't even run anymore, still grows food for the Richmond students for free. While we should not expect people to react like this in North Adams, it is great to know that most people were fully receptive.

The other key aspect to their program is hands-on work with the students and the community. They have created a form of a campaign around their local food procurement because it has been successful. Parents love the fact that their students are eating healthy and local. Kids also really like learning about where everything comes from and eating
nutritious food. Tammy told an anecdote about the students not knowing that the potatoes were local and coming for seconds and thirds, when they normally do not. While this might be slightly unbelievable, the sentiment and excitement about farm to school from Tammy was palpable.

**IX. Questionnaire and Interviews**

We have conducted 23 in person or over the phone interviews with farmers, ranging in interest from fully interested to not interested at all. It is somewhat difficult to distinguish some of the interest from immediate interest, but one of the ways we distinguished were the farms that were trying to get started as soon as we spoke to them. That being said, Brian Cole of Bigfoot Farms warned us of categorizing farms into interested or uninterested. He made a good point that many of the farmers might be interested and able to do it one year, but could have unforeseeable challenges that hinder their involvement the next. The survey tool we proposed initially, the Questionnaire for Farmers, has proven useful in providing a uniform baseline from which the farmers then expanded as we discussed the project with them. However, while the questionnaire provides basic questions, many times the conversations veer from these simple questions to more in-depth inquiries into their role in our project.

Before we begin asking the questions on the questionnaire, farmers usually know whether or not they are interested in the project from its introduction. Since many of the farmers did not pick up the phone immediately, a return phone call or email has been interpreted as indication of basic interest. We believe that certain questions in particular
give us more or less insight into the likelihood of participation of the farmer. Here is a complete list of the questions we used.

**Questionnaire for Farmers**

1. What does your farm produce?

2. Where do you sell it?

3. Do you sell wholesale? To any restaurants, stores or institutions?

4. Do you have extra products or is everything you produce easily sold?

5. Have you ever sold products to the local schools?

6. Would you be interested in selling to the North Adams public school system?

7. If so, would you consider planting extra crops specifically for this purpose?

8. If interested, how and when would you like the school system to contact you? A year in advance?

9. What are your ordering procedures? Purchasing procedures?

10. Do you have the ability to deliver produce?

11. Do you have the ability or willingness to prepare the produce?

12. What produce would/could be available for schools to order? Also when?

13. Are you able to plant ahead for schools in the future?

14. Is your farm interested in becoming HACCP Certified? If so are there barriers? How can we help you overcome those barriers?

Of these questions, the ones that have proven most fruitful and diverse in responses are the interest in selling to the school, considerations for planting and planning ahead, and delivery procedures. While many of the farms have had an interest in selling to the school,
most have not done so extensively in a different context. Jaeschke’s Orchard is an example of a farm that has experience with orders and deliveries with some of the schools in Adams, such as McCann Technical. When we talked on the phone with McCann Technical School’s Head of Culinary Arts, Pat Carridi, he said that the relationship was a good one. They buy weekly or biweekly from Jaeschke’s when the apples and pears are in season. One aspect of the relationship with Jaeschke’s is that the season runs from August until February, and they typically have a high yield of apples and pears. Additionally, the process is easy with Jaeschke’s delivery from Adams and they only need about a week of heads up. The only problem, Pat said, was the size of the apples. Jaeschke’s sells their apples by the crate and which can cause the actual amount of physical apples to vary weekly depending on their size. Sometimes, Pat said, they receive huge apples and then have to supplement that with Ginsberg or other big food producers, in order to meet the amount necessary to feed all the students.

Delivery is one of the questions that we find to be one of the most important. Cory Nicholas has asked us to gauge farmers’ willingness to deliver, and, if so, whether the would deliver to multiple locations. Further, we wanted to know whether they would charge for delivery. After talking with Jim Shultz from Red Shirt Farm and Brian Cole, it sounds like the current trend in small local farms is delivery and a level of food cleanliness and preparedness. While the produce is not ready to be immediately served, the trend is to cleaner, more appetizing- looking foods. Both mentioned that delivery was something that they always provide and factor into their costs.

Another question that we found necessary is whether or not the farmer would be willing to come to the schools and provide nutritional education on their produce. This type
of relationship would be key to a successful farm to school program. We believe that the farmers physically coming and explaining their process of growing food is much more effective than simply serving it up for a meal.

X. Interview Analysis

Though we have received nuanced responses from all of our in-person and phone interviews, we have separated the interviews into three main categories to further assess
the feasibility of the farms’ participation in the Farm to School Project. The four categories are Immediate Interested, Interested and Not Interested. Immediate interest is coupled with enthusiasm and typically some form of additional recommendation from the farmer. While it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between interested and immediately interested, these two categories are where the majority of our farmer’s responses fell. An interested response typically would like to be included in the future of our project’s progress, but expresses concerns about the feasibility or cost to the school. The Interested category typically has some type of stipulation or reason for skepticism in the project’s feasibility. The final category is simply Not interested. These responses range from lack of response to technical concerns.

i. **Immediately Interested:** Jaeschke’s Orchard, Bigfoot Farm, Grateful Greens, Carrie Burnett, Marty’s Local (not a farm, but interested), MX Morningstar, Many Forks Farm

Jaeschke’s Orchard was the first farm we visited and were ready to provide for the school immediately. They are one of the few local farms that already have a system in place where they provide apples and pears to local schools in the area. Jaeschke’s provides crates of apples, pears, butternut squash and cider to McCann Technical School weekly, September through February. They charge $25 dollars a bushel, which is about 120 apples. They also have a system in place with Hoosic Valley Regional School. In terms of delivery and ordering procedures, they would be willing to deliver. However, it will need to be negotiated in the future whether they deliver to all four of the North Adams Public Schools or just one large drop off. They do not expect payment immediately--with McCann, since
they get orders weekly, they get paid by the month. Jaeschke’s was more than happy to set up an account with North Adams Public Schools sooner rather than later.

James Mayer at Grateful Greens was also excited when it came to engaging with Farm to School and the North Adams public schools. He produces microgreens, which are great for salads or garnishes. He does a wide variety of microgreens, ranging from sunflower greens, pea shoots, and radishes. He also produces in high density clusters and has plenty of indoor space, so would be willing to plant in advance for the public schools. James has never sold to public schools, but has recently moved to North Adams and is interested in giving back to the community in this way. He has even offered to sell at whatever the school can provide, and would potentially donate some to the school. However, in order to set up a system with the school, he would rather have an expectation of how much he should plant in advance. Similar to Jaeschke’s, he has the capacity to deliver. His crops also take about a week to grow, so a heads up about two weeks in advance are all he needs to plant ahead of time. While he typically charges $20 per pound, he recognizes that this is a worthwhile project, and would be willing to lower his price.

One of James Mayer’s recommendations that he envisioned for the future would be a community farm. He believes that he and other farmers would be willing to farm a plot of land with a certain amount dedicated to the North Adams public schools. While this is not an immediately feasible solution, his dedication to the farm is promising, particularly coupled with our conversation with Mrs. Burnett.

Mrs. Burnett is the owner of Burnett Farms, a 500 acre plot of farmland in Adams, MA. She and her family have farmed the land for at least a generation and her daughter is returning to start a small, wholesale farm that sells exclusively to farm to table restaurants
in the area. Carrie has worked with the North Adams public school system for over 20 years. She was one of the farms that we visited, and she showed us the extent of the 500 acres that are mostly unused. Currently, Luke Burnett, an unrelated farmer, is working on meat production on the farm. However, Mrs. Burnett has the idea of leasing the land to interested farmers in the area and would be willing to have a stipulation in the leasing contract include providing produce to North Adams public schools. She has many ideas about what she could do with the land ranging from an AirBnB to a community farmstore. Though Mrs. Burnett does not have the farmers to lease the land yet, she would like to be able to give the public schools healthy produce at a lower price. Whatever the outcome of her farm expansion ideas, she is dedicated to the schools and thought participation with Farm to School and Cory would be a great way to use the land. This dedication to the school system, combined with James Mayer’s interest in future community farming, could provide a promising partnership with local farms and students at public schools.

Another interested farm that we spoke to at the Williamstown Indoor Farmer’s Market was MX Morningstar, located in Copake, NY. MX Morningstar farm is a 62 acre farm that produces nearly every fruit and vegetable. Though they are not as close as other farms in proximity to North Adams, they do work a little with the Pittsfield public school system. However, the majority of their business is to restaurants and distributors, including Marty’s Local. As a large farm, they do have the capacity to plant ahead for North Adams and would be willing to provide some of their fall and winter vegetables for a likely lower price than some other produce. They mentioned butternut squash, kale, potatoes and root crops as some of the most likely produce that they could sell to North Adams. They would need to hear from the North Adams schools in the late winter months in order to plant ahead for
the next seasons crops. While this is exciting, it could pose a problem for Cory, who may not be able to commit that early in advance. In terms of smaller orders, they could take any orders until 6 AM the morning of delivery. However, they would prefer more preparation time than that because they would have to drive from Copake.

Another very helpful “Yes” was Nick Martinelli from Marty’s Local. Nick Martinelli is a Williams graduate who runs a local food hub. He gathers and delivers produce from farmers across the Berkshire region. He was enthusiastic and, like Jaeschke’s, wanted to get to work right away. The one concern with Marty’s Local is that because they are not a non-profit food hub, they still get a cut of the profit as the middleman. For the schools, this could mean unnecessary added costs. However, as Nick explained, they provide much of the logistical coordination that Cory needs in order to get a variety of local farms into the North Adams public school’s cafeteria. Nick also was quite positive that there were certain vegetables that were within the school’s budget, having already spoken to Cory about this project in the last few months. Like Peace Valley Farm also forewarned, Nick wanted to make sure that there was dedication from the school’s end in order for this project to work. However, the possibility of reducing one of the delivering and procurement steps for Cory could be a key asset in the development of Farm to School in North Adams.

Williams graduate Brian Cole was similarly interested in our project. He and Lucy Rollins have recently begun farming in Williamstown at Bigfoot Farm. Since he just finished his first year of farming, he was definitely in making the North Adams public schools part of his typical yield. He also was very helpful in giving us some of the basic price points of his produce, highlighting the vegetables that would most likely be within the school’s budget. However, like other farmers, such as Red Shirt Farm, he was concerned with being able to
sell at wholesale price to schools. While his prices are still not official, he said that his projected numbers were probably still outside of the school’s budget. Like most of the farmers we talked to, Brian was also very interested in working with the school’s end and speaking in person to the students to teach them about local farming.

One of the main takeaways we had from the interviews with “Definitely Interested” farmers was that many had already worked with or were familiar with the school systems. As a result of working with or in the schools, some of these farms have a bigger stake in the importance of getting healthy, nutritious foods to students. Another interesting observation from these enthused interviews was the desire to go one step past our feasibility study. Many had other solutions in mind that they had been considering that could be coupled with Farm to School in North Adams. Mrs. Carrie Burnett’s farm is one example. Additionally, James Mayer and Ioka Valley Farm offered to donate some of their products to either fundraise money for the program or raise awareness. Finally, almost every farmer that we interviewed in this category offered delivery and washing services to make the process easier for Cory and the entire kitchen staff.

ii. Interested: Wildstone Farm, Ioka Valley Farm, Markristo Farm (maybe a no), Mighty Food Farm, Windsor Jambs Farm, Colfax Farm, Brattle Farm, Square Roots, Talus Wood Food

Many of the farms that we spoke to were ambiguously between “Definitely Interested” and “Interested.” However, one key characteristic of interested was the understanding and concerns about the challenges that could limit their farm’s involvement with the project. We also noted that most every farm that we spoke to was interested in
speaking and presenting their produce in the schools. Additionally, most every farm in the area has the capacity to deliver. However, not every farm can deliver every day of the week, so they would have to be contacted in advance.

Foresight and planning for the future farming operations was one of the key challenges in this category. Almost all farms that we have spoken to are on the smaller side. As a result, they need advanced notice from the North Adams public schools in order to provide food for them since there is rarely ever surplus. Most every farm expressed a desire to know at least a few months in advance. Many said that they typically start planning between November-January for the next year. This could be challenging if Cory wanted to get started with the project immediately.

Ang and Carmen did a site visit to John and Joy Primmer’s Farm, Wildstone. These two have been farming for many years and while interested, said they were thinking about retiring soon. However, they used to do more wholesale, though never to schools and were interested in hearing more from Cory. They produce most every vegetable and would be particularly useful in providing some of the mixed greens or root vegetables. They have a couple acres and some indoor greenhouses that could make it possible to produce through the winter.

We spoke to a few of the preliminarily interested farms at the Williamstown Indoor Farmers Market on November 18th. Some of the farms that we contacted but never heard back from were present and interested in speaking with us. Mighty Food Farm for example is a large farm in Pittsfield that said they would be potentially interested in working with North Adams. They do deliver their fruits and vegetables to vendors in the North Adams area. However, while they were helpful, the two men working the booth did acknowledge
that they would need to have a more in-depth conversation with the head of the farm, Lisa McDougall.

We also spoke to Markristo Farm. While they did entertain the idea of the working with the North Adams public schools, they are located in Hillsdale, NY and said they would not be interested in doing frequent visits. Also, their main produce was mixed greens and kale, so they do not have quite the variety that some of the other farms did.

Brattle Farm was also tabling at the Farmer’s Market and were happy to talk about Farm to School. While they loved the idea and were interested in participating, they foresaw issues with the school not having a larger plot of land to farm. Like James Mayer and Carrie Burnett, the suggested looking into a community farm where people would grow produce specifically for the school. While they believed that their wholesale prices were probably too high for the school to afford at that time, they did express interest in potentially engaging with a community farm if it became a reality.

Ang and Carmen also had a few interesting conversations with farms at the Williamstown Agricultural Commission dinner. We spoke with the Reeds, of Ioka Valley Farm. While they were definitely interested in our project, the only product they produce in bulk is maple syrup. However, at Ioka, they had the idea of potentially donating some syrup for a future fundraiser that we could do to raise money for the public schools. At this same dinner, we spoke with Talus Wood Farm. They said they would be interested in potentially providing grapes and berries, some produce we have not heard too much about in the area.
iii. Not Interested: Heavy Metal, Caretaker Farm, Holiday Brook Farm, Mountain Girl Farm, Black Bear Farm, Peace Valley Farm

The “Not Interested” category has been the most straightforward thus far, albeit disappointing. Mountain Girl Farm, though they have some produce, mostly makes soaps. She was also not interested in a relationship with the North Adams public schools at this point because she did not think it would turn into a fruitful relationship for her farm. She doubted the feasibility of a farm to school program in North Adams because she said she had been contacted about similar projects before by Williams College students and nothing had come out of it. Her reaction was completely understandable. This motivated us to make sure that something does come out of this project or at the very least others will continue to work on it because all the people we talked to had graciously taken time out of their day for this project.

While many of the farms we have talked to are small, Black Bear Farm is an extreme case. They only produce certain fruits, such as strawberries and blueberries and only grow the fruit during the summer when school was out of season. She also could not expand her farm and does not have an interest in doing so, because she only sells to a local summer camp.

This response was similar to that of Holiday Brook Farm, who expressed that while she does produce many of the vegetables that we were looking for, her farm was too small. Many of the farms that said that they were not interested were concerned about the size of their farm as well. They may not, understandably, want to spend the time or effort planting extra for North Adams schools when it is not guaranteed that the project will have a long shelf-life.
Supplying wholesale to the schools did not match with Caretaker Farm’s mission to more directly connect people with the land that supports them. However, they did mention that they would be more than happy to host volunteers from North Adams schools because this arrangement would more closely align with their mission.

Other “Not Interested” responses included retired, currently out of commission, concern for feasibility of the project, wrong type of foods produced and different growing seasons. We also believe that the list of farms that we contacted multiple times and never heard back from probably had similar reasons to the farms that expressed disinterest. However, in the future, it would still be in the best interest of North Adams Public Schools to reach out to some of the farmers that never responded.

XI. Brayton Survey Results

![Survey Results Image]

*Figure 3. Survey used as Brayton Elementary School*

In addition to interviews with farmers, we believe that an important aspect of our project was understanding Farm to School from the North Adams public school students.
We conducted an onsite survey with students at Brayton Elementary school to gauge what types of fruits and vegetables they like most. Our survey consisted of pictures of a fruit or vegetable that local farms produce, with a scale of smiley faces under to indicate how much the student likes or dislikes that particular item. We used a picture scale to rate each item so the survey would be more accessible to younger students. We also learned though our research that young children have a tendency to say “yes” when asked questions, so we incorporated a scale that made the children select their opinions on the fruit or vegetable. Overall, we surveyed 25 students during lunch period for 1st through 2nd grade and 5th through 6th grade.

![Brayton Elementary Survey Results](image)

**Figure 4.** Brayton Elementary School Survey Results

Our survey results gave us some better insight on what the students at Brayton like and do not like. One of the main findings was that students did not know what butternut squash or beets were. Those two foods have some of the lowest ratings on the scale and kids often just wrote that they did not know what it was next to the picture. Kale was
another item that most students were unsure about. Mixed greens in general had some mixed reviews, some students really enjoyed mixed greens, and others did not. For the most part, we saw positive ratings of most of the fruits and vegetables. Apples, carrots, cucumbers, and potatoes had strong ratings indicating that students like those types of food. Apples and potatoes were amongst the most popular food items for the students.

While at Brayton, we had the opportunity to talk with the food manager there and interview her about what she notices with the students eating patterns. She told us that the students tend to be very open to trying new fruits and vegetables. Having someone tell the students to “just try a bite” tends to work, and that was exciting news for us. From her perspective, the students seem open to trying new things, including vegetables. Teachers encouraged the students, and that encouragement goes a long way. We also learned that dipping sauces are very popular amongst the students, particularly ranch.

Talking with the kitchen director also helped us understand what Farm to School could look like from their point of view. Originally, we were concerned that there would be some pushback from the kitchen staff. Reasons for this expected resistance, we believed, would be that they would have to spend more time making and preparing local food. However, Kathy completely dissuaded these fears. She said that while it may take slightly extra preparation time, it was worth it in the long-run. She fully understood the benefits of bringing local foods to the schools.
XII. Toolkit

Our final Toolkit, which we distributed at the Food Access Collaborative on December 11th, is a working document that has outlined all of our research and findings. We were thrilled by the turnout at our presentation, as well as the responses that we received afterward. While we did not have too many copies of the Toolkit to distribute in-person, Amanda sent out an email to those associated with the Food Access Collaborative in the Berkshires after our presentation. In addition to the distribution of the Toolkit, we were thrilled when Amanda mentioned that they would be meeting with the Wellness Committee in a few weeks to discuss the Farm to School Project. Since our original outline of the project, we understand the inclusion of the Wellness Committee to be crucial to a successful implementation. The Toolkit, as well as our presentation, appears to have generated the right type of momentum for this project. An important piece of the implementation process, as we outlined in the Toolkit, is incorporating nutritional education into Farm to School. It is of the utmost importance that the students understand why local food is a better option.

With ease and readability at the forefront of our concerns, the Toolkit is also a detailed compilation of our interviews with farmers. While we have asked each of them the exact same questions for the sake of uniformity, each response was nuanced in its own way. These nuances have the potential to clarify which farmers would be the most likely to participate in the program in the future. With this in mind, Amanda thought it would be most useful to rank the farms in order of participation likelihood. This participatory scale would incorporate multiple pieces of the questionnaire, as well as our judgment on the enthusiasm from speaking directly to the farmers. Because the scale of interest (immediate
interest, interest, and non-interest) is fluid, the ranking system is more an approximation than a concrete ranking. For example, Jaeschke’s Orchard was ready to participate immediately and wondering when we would start ordering. They already have a Farm to School system in place with McCann Technical School, where they deliver to them weekly in season. With an orchard, such as theirs that does not need to additionally plant, has a perpetually fixed price of their apples and is willing to deliver, they are a definite yes. Low hanging fruit, as one might say.

In addition to ranking the farmers, we highlighted some of the specifications that the farmers included in their interviews. For example, some of the smaller farms that expressed interest in participating would need to plant early. In order to do this they would need to hear most likely in the later winter months of January–March for the next fall. These stipulations are essential to include in order for the system to work.

A final aspect of the Toolkit includes our recommendations. We had two that aligned with both our long-term and short-term vision. In the short-term, we feel that Harvest of the Month specific to North Adams would be a successful way to ensure local food makes it into cafeterias. Long-term, our vision would include ways to make food procurement cheaper and more sustainable through fruits and vegetables that were planted in significant quantities directly for the school. While not a concrete solution, our vision of this aligns with the ideas that Carrie Burnett had for the future of Burnett Farms. Like many other school districts with successful Farm to School programs, ours would need to be able to produce at least a certain amount monthly.
XIII. Official Recommendations

i. Harvest of the Month: *North Adams Edition*

![Harvest of the Month Calendar](image)

*Figure 5. Harvest of the Month Calendar created for North Adams School (Adapted from Vermont Farm to School Network)*

In order to make the scope of the immediate project more feasible, we chose to pursue a smaller project like the “Harvest of the Month” to get more local food into the schools. Because the existing Massachusetts statewide “Harvest of the Month” does not necessarily reflect the agricultural products available to North Adams, we decided to create a “Harvest of the Month” style project specific to North Adams public schools. We based our list of produce and the timeline on conversations with local farmers and their feedback on our project. Every month the food service director would actively seek out a certain
amount of the highlighted produce from local suppliers. Because each month has specific produce, curriculum can be built around teaching students about food production and nutrition. Both the Massachusetts and Vermont “Harvest of the Month” projects have many resources for teachers and food staff to better educate the students on each harvest item. Additionally on the farmers’ side, the calendar of featured foods might be helpful to understand better what the schools are especially interested in purchasing and when they are most likely to purchase it. An ideal situation would be one where Cory would contact local farmers on our list a year in advance when the farmers are planning for the season, communicating the needs of the schools and coordinating a procedure to supply the school. A potential concern that would need to be addressed with the system is logistics for Cory in organizing farmers and monthly produce for the project. We would not want to overburden him and make this program become a hassle with too many farmers to connect with in a given week or month. This is one of the biggest problem with working with many local farms, however, there are local food hubs or food distributors such as Marty’s Local that could play a big role in simplifying the process.

**ii. Burnett Farms: Community Farm, Land-Leasing, Farming Projects, etc.**

Another alternative to implementing Farm to School in North Adams is creating a community farm or a cooperative food system. This idea was generated in our meeting with Carrie Burnett, owner of Burnett Farms. She owns a total of 500 acres of farmland that is under APR protection in Adams and is looking to use the land for different agriculture ventures. One venture she herself brought up was the possibility of using a part of the vast farmland to create a community-based farm. She was willing to provide a cheaper farm
lease with the condition that a certain number of rows be grown specifically for the North Adams Public Schools. The schools would be able to purchase these products at the price point that is financially feasible for them. The other rows of produce can be used to establish a CSA program in North Adams or even a farm store. According to Amanda, North Adams currently does not have any CSA programs, therefore having a CSA program at the Burnett farm would introduce a new way of purchasing food. Many CSA programs in the area already work with households that cannot afford the average price of a CSA membership and/or accept SNAP recipients. Using the economic model from these types of farms, this community farm can increase access to local foods to a more socioeconomically diverse group of people.

As for the ownership of the community farm, this can be based on different models of existing CSAs such as Intervale Community Farm (ICF). ICF is owned by members through a consumer cooperative. The members pay a flat fee of about $200, and in return have special access to CSA membership and can vote annually for members of the board in charge of the farm operations. In this case, the farmers would get a salary for their work on their farm and the board would allocate revenue generated by the farm to operating the farm. Another model could be a farmers’ cooperative where multiple farmers develop a CSA program but heavily involve local residents through different programs and incentives.

Using a model similar to that of Caretaker Farm, the farm can host groups of students from the nearby schools and colleges to volunteer with various tasks on the farm. There can even be an afterschool program where students from all grade levels come to learn about agricultural practices and production. Establishing these programs will take a lot of coordination between the schools and the farm. Furthermore, the interests in
participating in these programs are likely to fluctuate between different school years which makes it difficult for the full-time farmers to rely on these programs as a constant source of labor. Additionally, the community farm can also try to attract North Adams and Adams residents interested in or curious about agriculture production by offering a discount on produce for volunteering in the farm. This push for community participation can bring in significant social benefits; farmers, students, and the larger community work together to produce their food. It connects the consumers to the site of production in a holistic way. Students get exposure to local foods and farms not only through their meals at school but also through these programs, where they actually help out at the farms. Additionally, this alternative includes families, who ideally would be able to subscribe to the CSA program or purchase goods from the farm store.

This idea of a community farm is still at its conception stages and therefore many of the important details have not been figured out. First and foremost, Carrie Burnett needs to find farmers who have an interest in taking on such a project. Organizations that connect farmers to available farmland could be used to ease the process of finding farmers. James Mayer from Grateful Greens has indicated strong interest in a type of community farm, therefore we are convinced that there must be farmers interested in this type of venture in the future. Finding and connecting these interested parties will be the brunt of the task.

The main concern about running a farm that grows food for the schools would be potential long-term economic costs. This relationship might not end up being financially sustainable for the farm depending on the price the North Adams public schools are able to pay for the products. One economic and environmental benefit is the lower cost of delivery because of the farm’s proximity to the schools. One of the many ways to offset the costs
could be applying for USDA grants. Grants such as Community Food Project (CFP) and Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) support efforts that seek to increase access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products. Similarly, the Farm to School grant mentioned earlier has three different tracts: Implementation, Planning, and Training. These grants are open not only to schools but also community projects and organizations that would aid in the process of increasing the amount of food served in schools. Projects such as community farms and food hubs fit the description for these grants. Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers. Meanwhile, the Business and Industry (B&I) Loan Program give loans to farms in need of initial capital.

Although this idea needs to be fleshed out further and has many different moving parts, it provides a holistic way of introducing more local foods to all of North Adams. This effort would include not only the students but everyone in the community, if they choose to take part in it. They could be involved in almost every part of the farm operation, and gain a deeper understanding of agriculture and the importance of eating local.

**XIV. Implementation Strategies & Recommendations**

One of the most important pieces of the final Toolkit is the Recommendations section. These recommendations come from areas where we saw challenges to implementation of Farm to School in North Adams. They range from perceptions of vegetables to funding. While the challenges are not insurmountable as demonstrated by the
national push for Farm to School in public schools, we believe that they should be highlighted and addressed for the long-term success of this project.

The first recommendation we would give is the inclusion of the wellness committee on the implementation of Farm to School. This recommendation is something that both Amanda and Cory are already aware of, but we do want to touch on the benefits of this frame to the project. With a wellness commission on board, we believe there could be more adults during meal times advocating for the local foods and nutrition. The extra staffing, most likely volunteer or already on the payroll, would be the necessary extra hands in the intricate processes of picking up the deliveries, making the necessary phone calls, creating a definite schedule for communication with the local farms, and aiding in the essential education piece.

Nutritional education is essential to a successful Farm to School program as has been observed at a national level. Students, be it children or teenagers, would benefit from the education of where their food comes from, why it is better to support local businesses and why local fruits and vegetables are better for their bodies. The school health staff are most likely educated about nutrition, so they can teach students about food and healthy habits. However, we realize that the nurses can be busy, so having a volunteer from wellness staff sit with the students and create buzz about local foods in the cafeteria would go a long way. In addition to the wellness staff, we have asked each local farmer if they would be willing to visit the schools to give a presentation either in the cafeteria and/or the classroom. Every farmer that has been even slightly interested in the program has responded to this question with a resounding “Yes!”
Another recommendation that we view as essential to the future success of our project is procuring additional funds. While there is the USDA Farm to School Grant and Massachusetts Farm to School Grants, at this time, Cory Nicholas is not particularly interested in applying for them. He has had some experience in filling out these grants and found that the paperwork and likelihood for repeated acquisition of the grant was too much for him to handle. The paperwork to fill out the grant application is then followed by close follow-ups throughout the year to check the grants funds are being properly allocated. While this makes sense, it is difficult for him to fathom applying for a grant when there is no Farm to School system currently in place that could track the allocated funds. However, we would recommend the reconsideration of applying for the grants in the future, once this program is solidified. The USDA grants over $7.5 million directly to Farm to School programs with the hope of making procuring local foods from nearby farmers more of a reality. The Farm to School Grant Program has three different tracks available: planning, implementation, and training. This type of grant could be extremely helpful for North Adams public schools, in order to begin the groundwork for bringing more local foods into schools officially.

While applying for grants might potentially not be in the cards at the moment, we do think that raising money for Farm to School in North Adams has serious potential. When we spoke to Amanda Chilson, she was particularly excited about this idea. She believes, as a mother of a kindergartener, that the Parent-Teacher Association would be interested in hosting fundraisers or raffles for Farm to School. One idea that we thought could be and informative is a bake sale/raffle of baked goods. This could be parents, teachers, or farmers baking with and then selling products from local farms. This could include apple pies from
local orchards or a salad bar loaded with local veggies that people pay to attend. These types of community engagement could get all parties excited about Farm to School and raise money. Also, we already have one farmer interested in donating half a gallon of her maple syrup to raffle off for the explicit goal of raising money to Farm to School. While money is important here, with the help of the PTA and Northern Berkshire Community Coalition’s creative thinking, funds could be procured without grant money in the initial years of the program.

An additional recommendation that has been a concern since the beginning of the project concerns student interest in the fruits and vegetables that will be provided. A crucial piece of the Farm to School program that was alluded to in the first recommendation about wellness staff was education. We believe that in-person education about the farming procedures of the produce that will be prepared will make students more interested in eating the food. At the outset of the project, Cory expressed that foods, like squash, are sometimes not well received because they are not as well known. The education provided by the farmers about the nutritional value and growing processes of these somewhat foreign fruits and veggies would hopefully make them look more edible.

In addition to farmers, teachers and the wellness committee, we also believe that Williams College students could play a role in nutritional education and encouraging students to try the food. Currently, Williams Students participate in an ASSIST program on Fridays. They serve as buddies for the students, eating lunch and playing at recess. The students love hanging out with them, and we think that the elementary school students would be open to trying foods introduced by the college kids.
We believe that NBCC’s involvement will undoubtedly be crucial to the future feasibility of Farm to School in North Adams. We were reassured in recently speaking with Amanda that she is equally, if not more, dedicated to the success of this project as we are. Some farmers have expressed concern about dedication necessary for implementation. Therefore, our recommendation to quell that concern would be frequent, gracious contact with the farmers to reassure that the project is still being worked on. While our roles as researching the feasibility will come to an end in December, the work that we have put forward will hopefully make local farms and the food they produce more accessible.

XV. Conclusion

We have been pleasantly surprised and excited to see where this project has taken us. The support is there for Farm to School in North Adams right now. Farmers are interested and Cory is dedicated to the project. We have heard time and time again that having a dedicated food service director is unbelievably important for the project’s success. We are thrilled that Cory has asked for our help and that he believes that the information we provided will be useful. From here on out, we wait with anticipation to see where this project goes!

XVI. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to Amanda Chilson and Cory Nicholas for all their help and guidance throughout the project. We would also like to recognize Professor Gardner for all the feedback and support she provided. We would also like to extend our thanks to Brian Cole and Carrie Burnett for talking to us multiple times and sharing their
insights. Additionally, this project would not have been possible without all the people we interviewed during the process. We thank all our interviewees for taking time out of their day to talk to us and answer our questions.

Figure 6. Cute pigs at Red Shirt Farm

THANK YOU!

XVII. Works Cited


Colegrove Park Elementary School. “Colegrove Park Elementary School Improvement Plan 2016-2017.” <1.cdn.edl.io/Ebs9SVX7InZrra2qwKNZsn8a9I9XmEF04wtx5e8cVdAoWV9j.pdf>

Drury High School. “Drury High School: Level 3 School Turnaround Plan Template.” <1.cdn.edl.io/1g7wj80RCPfshAREu3NmYjqWdLmQBE1lu6icn0V1GlpPfWso.pdf>


Greylock School. “Greylock School Improvement Plan 2016-2017.” <1.cdn.edl.io/jr7HThtnLbxSwuWlzTaYabtb5fjOnSPlv1oF31lXTw1dYZ.pdf>

“Mythbusting: Did Farm to School Work?” Massachusetts Farm to School, www.massfarmtoschool.org/.


Sustainable Berkshires. “Local Food and Agriculture” Adopted March 2014
http://berkshireplanning.org/images/uploads/documents/Sustainable_Berkshires-
Local_Food_and_Agriculture-20140320a.pdf

USDA. Farm to School Grants. December 10, 2018. USDA
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>